

ascribed them to me. There is certainly some imitation of my style, and the writer is familiar with my works.

Feb. 5.

The *Letters of Runnymede* are still making a great sensation. They are considered as rising regularly in power, and the two last, the characters of Lord [ohn] R[ussell] and O'C[onnell] are generally esteemed the most powerful. *Fraser*, which is making some noise, is the highest eulogy I ever received, saying: 'Swift observes, the appearance of a great genius in the world may always be known by the virulence of the dunces, and that this has been singularly illustrated in my case,' &c. Peel told Lyndhurst the last letter was the most powerful of all; so it is generally esteemed.¹

That the letters were immensely effective at the time of their appearance there is no room for doubt, but their style is hardly such as to win appreciation now or to act as a salt to preserve them for posterity. Urbanity was certainly not in those days a characteristic of Disraeli's controversial methods any more than it was a characteristic of the journalism of the time; and whatever wit or wisdom the letters may contain, their tone is too personal, their invective too unmeasured, and even their praise, when they praise, too little under restraint for the taste of the present day. The abuse of O'Connell, for instance, in the letter which Peel thought so powerful exceeds all bounds in its savagery: — < He is a systematic liar and a beggarly cheat, a swindler, and a poltroon

.....His public and his private life are equally profligate; he has committed every crime that does not require courage.'² In the case of O'Connell there was of course personal animus to add venom to the shaft, but others who were guiltless of provocation are made to suffer hardly less. 'You have a most surprising disdain for the law of libel,' wrote Barnes on some occasion, and the law of libel was evidently less of a terror to newspapers in those days than now. Disraeli never till the end of his life acknowledged the authorship of the letters, and probably he was

¹ *Letters*, pp. 100 and 102.

² Letter VIII. To the People.